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ABSTRACT

This speech, given on March 23, 1971, at a luncheon meeting of the Troy Rotary, presents an overview of the Regents External Degree. After presenting opening humorous remarks, the author concentrates on a description of the External Degree, as modeled after the English Open University. The remainder of his remarks concern the progress made through the College Proficiency Examination Program and how New York State intends to develop an External Degree Program. The External Degree will meet the demand for an increasing variety of postsecondary education, especially in view of the limited financial resources available within the traditional college campus. The Regents External Degree Program, by contributing to an educated citizenry, will also enhance the social and economic development of the state and provide social and economic mobility for the individual who is frequently barred from advancement in employment and increased social status because he doesn't have a degree. (Author/PG)

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THE REGENTS EXTERNAL DEGREE

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NOTE: The attached remarks were made on March 23, 1971, in Troy, New York, at a luncheon meeting of the Troy Rotary.

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THE REGENTS EXTERNAL DEGREE

Mr. Fitzgibbons, Gentlemen of the Rotary:

I want you to know that I regard Jim Fitzgibbons as the outstanding college president in this State -- in his age group -- whatever age group that is.

Mr. Hoffman wrote me some time ago, tempting me with the prospect of speaking to you today. The final sentence of his letter said: "We want to hear the latest dope from Albany." Because of the liberated rhetoric of the day, I couldn't figure this out for a while.

I have been Commissioner of Education for a little over a year. There have been no surprises. But, as Kingman Brewster, President of Yale, has said, "I don't mind living in a goldfish bowl; it's just that someone keeps trying to poison the water."

A condition of public employment is that one becomes a symbol and a target for all the ills of education and the problems of a few other sectors of society, as well, including the fiscal fitness of the State. Not only that, but since my job is to change the status quo -- which is just another Latin name for the mess we're in -- and since we live in an increasingly conservative society, one that is gyroscopic and finds it difficult to change direction -- well, you can imagine that part of the job is to accept with equanimity, public and

private criticism, criticism that is not always constructively abrasive and not infrequently associated with liberated rhetoric.

Plenty of people keep me humble. I am reminded of the man and his wife who went to church one day. Out loud, the man prayed: "Oh, Lord, make me successful, and please keep me humble." His wife, kneeling beside him, chimed in with a somewhat corrective plea: "Oh, Lord, You make him successful, I'll keep him humble."

And then there are those who, while they are not vicious in their criticism, do, indeed, suggest that one is not exactly working in the most fruitful vineyards. These subtle critics remind me of the pompous Church of England cleric who said to his non-conformist colleague one day: "We are both doing God's work -- you in your way and I in His."

These past few weeks, I haven't met a man yet that I didn't dislike, regardless of his race, creed, or color. None of my best friends are people.

In short, I feel very much like what the wildcat said in the middle of making love to a skunk: "I've enjoyed as much of this as I can stand."

I am reminded of H. L. Mencken's definition of a Puritan: a person who has a sinking feeling that somebody somewhere is having some fun.

I feel special kinship, too, with the man who was bitten by a dog. Evenutally he was told by the doctor that he had rabies. The patient took out a pad and pen and started writing.

"No need to write your will," said the doctor, "we'll pull you through."

"It's not my will," said the man. "It's a list of people I'm going to bite."

My present inclination, reminds me, too, of the story of the tired Detroit executive who dragged himself home from the office after the roughest day imaginable. As he wearily opened the door, his small daughter screamed: "Daddy, Daddy! You've got to help me with my arithmetic." He held her off until he'd hung up his coat, then asked for the problem. "How do you take one-eighth from one-fifth?" she asked.

"Honey," he signed, "I was just about to do it."

Your reception of me as a comparative stranger and Mr. Hoffman's methods of persuasion, remind me of a story. You don't need this story, but I need to tell it to you.

It is the story of the minister who was soliciting funds for building a new church. His increasing supplicant stoop and mendicant curvature were symptoms that sufficient resources were hard to come by. His vision seemed impossible of achievement until one day a wealthy banker moved into town and the minister went to work on him for a contribution. The banker only promised that he would think it over. The minister, however, did not mind being a little sly in doing God's work, and believing that old bankers never die, they just lose interest, he had inserted in the next day's paper a statement that the campaign was over and that the banker agreed to donate a half-million dollars.

On seeing this, the banker figured he had no alternative, called the minister and said he would give the money on the condition that he would have the privilege of placing the inscription on the arch over the entrance to the church. The minister readily agreed. On the day of the dedication, the entrance was unveiled and over the doorway was this message from the 25th Chapter of Matthew, the 35th verse: "I was a stranger and you took me in."

I am going to speak about the external degree idea which I announced at my inauguration last September.

First, let me describe briefly the educational system we have in our State. James Thurber, my favorite humorist, once replied, in answer to the question. "How's your wife?" by asking in turn, "Compared to what?" So let me tell you what we are and what we do.

About 185 years ago, the people of the State created a unified system of education known as The University of the State of New York, not to be confused with the State University of New York, our operating university. The State Constitution guarantees the existence of the University of the State of New York as a separate, non-political, corporate entity and as a fourth branch of government. Thus, it has the protective autonomy of constitutional status. This system, headed by the Board of Regents and whose administrative arm is the State Education Department, is unique in the Union, and is the oldest, continuous State educational administrative agency in America. Its purpose is to enlarge and improve educational, professional, and cultural opportunities in New York State.

The University of the State of New York comprises all the private and public colleges in the State as well as private, public and parochial schools, museums, libraries, historical societies, and other kinds of educational institutions or agencies. The State is the campus of The University. Education in its broadest sense is its business. It is the overarching constitutional concept giving orderliness, coherence, direction, and character to the educational enterprise of the State. It symbolizes the seriousness with which education has traditionally been viewed by our citizens.

The Regents are authorized to establish Rules and Regulations which will carry into effect the laws of the State relating to education, including requirements for degrees and the licensing by examination of all professions in the State except law. They incorporate private colleges and, indeed, they award the degrees to graduates of these colleges for the first few years of their existence.

You may recall that at my Inauguration as Commissioner of Education and President of The University of the State of New York last September, I proposed that the Regents award undergraduate degrees to persons who possess knowledge equivalent to that of a degree recipient from a New York State college or university. The emphasis would be on what a person knows, not on where or how he learned it. In the months that followed I was supported by several national commissions, most notably by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, and by Alan Pifer, President of the Carnegie Corporation

of New York who called for the establishment of an "open university" in New York State. Chancellor Ernest Boyer of the State University joined me in seeking the establishment of just such a system and last month, as many of you know, the Board of Regents and the State University of New York received grants of nearly $2 million from Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation to establish off-campus college degree programs in New York State during the next two years. The decision of these foundations, long known for their encouragement and support of education, was particularly gratifying to me because of my own personal commitment to making our educational system more flexible and open and humanistic. The Governor is also in full support of this approach.

The idea of an external degree is not new. In England, for example, an external degree program has been operated by the University of London since the 1830's. In fact, during the first seventy years of its existence the University of London had only external students, none in residence. More recently the British have established an Open University -- which began offering instruction by radio, television, cassettes, correspondence courses, to nearly 25,000 students in January of this year. Very little work will be done on campus at Open University. Instead learning centers, where students will have access to tutors and instructional materials, will be set up throughout the United Kingdom in an attempt to reach students where they live. Thus external degree means that people acquire the knowledge necessary to secure the degree away from or largely outside the institution granting the degree.

In this country pioneer efforts at recognizing learning achieved outside formal classrooms, have been undertaken by the University of Chicago, the University of Oklahoma, and Goddard College to name only a few, but nowhere on a large scale nor with full use of modern technology.

You may also have heard recently about new "Universities Without Walls", funded by various federal government agencies. Skidmore, College, with financial support from the U. S. Office of Education, will offer a plan for undergraduate education to students who live off-campus and who have had a considerable amount of experience.

But in addition to the many different notions of higher education which have surfaced in the seventies, in this past year we witnessed the coming-of-age of credit-by-examination in New York State. Since 1963, the State Education Department has offered College Proficiency Examinations to enable individuals to obtain college credit or other educational advantages, without formal college classroom preparation. During the period 1963-1969, more than 4,000 tests were taken in over 25 different subjects. In 1970, alone, nearly 6,000 proficiency examinations were given, more than were administered in the entire previous history of the program.

Let me concentrate the remainder of my remarks on the progress we have made through the College Proficiency Examination Program and on how we intend to build on that experience, with the help of the Ford-Carnegie Grant, to develop an external degree program in New York State.

College Proficiency Exams are developed and graded by outstanding faculty members from New York colleges and universities, under the guidance of State Education Department staff and testing specialists. The tests usually correspond to material covered in one or more semesters of a college course, with standards determined by first administering the examinations to regular colleges classes. Most of New York's higher institutions -- and many from other parts of the country -- grant credit or advanced standing for acceptable performance on these exams. Similarly, the State Education Department and the New York City Board of Education accept them for meeting certain requirements for teaching certificates.

The Program assists the individuals taking its tests by providing study guides and reading lists and follows up on those who request credit from educational organizations across the nation. Program candidates and participating colleges have reported the granting of well over 7,000 college credits on the basis of proficiency exams, and several hundred additional examinations have been accepted as meeting teacher certification requirements.

In recent years the Program has had its greatest effect in the nursing sciences, foreign languages, and professional education.

The major breakthrough has come in the field of nursing where, in two short years, we have administered over 4,800 examinations in five nursing sciences. More important than the number of exams given is the use made of the results by the nursing education community within and beyond New York's borders. Practical nurses who wish to enter licensed Registered Nurse Programs in Two-Year Associate Degree and Three-Year Hospital School

Diploma curriculums and RN's in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, are gaining recognition for their abilities in the form of credit or advanced standing. I am pleased to report that most of the State's baccalaureate and associate degree-granting nursing programs -- 45 of 65 -- are currently using our examinations to provide open-ended career opportunities for nurses. Remaining institutions are considering using our examinations and many hospital diploma nursing programs are already making use of them. Nurses interested in moving up the career ladder are frequently earning as much as a full year's credit for the knowledge they are able to demonstrate through our proficiency examinations.

In foreign languages, almost 2200 candidates have demonstrated their competence in French, German, Italian, Russian, or Spanish, generally in order to satisfy teacher certification requirements, but frequently to assess skills acquired through regular college study or while residing abroad. CPE's in professional education subjects such as educational psychology, and the history and philosophy of education have been taken by nearly 1000 candidates since the beginning of the program for teacher certification purposes.

An important feature of the College Proficiency Examination Program is its flexibility. New examinations are developed in areas of immediate concern, as determined by the education community and by Department priorities. The new examinations in the nursing sciences provide only one example of the Program's flexibility. At present we are developing three proficiency tests in the health education sciences. This timely project will

include such topics as drug use and abuse, world health and population problems, and environmental health problems and control. The health examinations will help facilitate the flow of qualified certified teachers in this important field, where they are badly needed. We are also developing examinations in Afro-American and Puerto Rican studies to meet the pressing need for ways of assessing these new subject matter fields.

The widespread acceptance of CPE's has reached beyond New York's border to many neighboring states and, indeed, to other parts of the world. Educational authorities in more than 30 states have requested information on our Program, particularly in the area of nursing, providing significant opportunities to expand the Program across state lines in the interest of educational service and economy. Course credit is already being given at colleges beyond New York's borders, and we have established a regular testing center at the Department's Educational Resources Center in New Delhi, India, to meet the needs of members of the Peace Corps and other Americans who might wish to obtain college credit when they return to New York.

A Home Study Clearinghouse has recently been established in the Department to evaluate the content of independent study materials -- correspondence courses, programmed texts and study guides -- and will publish its findings as widely as possible across the State through many institutions and agencies. The Clearinghouse activities will support existing and projected proficiency exams and, of course, areas in which external degrees are available.

The awarding of undergraduate degrees on the basis of examinations is the natural culmination of the credit-by-examination concept. The external degree program I propose will be based on the principles and experiences which have evolved in our own College Proficiency Examination Program. The Carnegie-Ford funds will be used to enlarge the proficiency examination concept and establish a mechanism which could provide a college degree for individuals who, in the opinion of recognized scholars, demonstrate accomplishments comparable to those of persons studying in regular college programs. Such individuals might have gained their education either within or outside the traditional classrooms of higher education. With the advent of an external degree program, persons of all ages may earn recognition for independent study. Such a move by the Regents, moreover, will encourage higher institutions in the State and the country to attain a similar degree of flexibility to meet rapdily expanding academic needs.

It is not enough, of course, simply to provide a testing device for independent study. The corollary is the enhancement of extramural educating opportunities so that individuals seeking a Regents External Degree might find greater non-traditional opportunities for self-study. The Home Study Clearinghouse will serve this purpose.

There are many reasons why the establishment of an external degree program will be important to all who are interested in higher education. There is a demand and need for an increasing variety of post-secondary education for

all who can profit from it, especially in view of the limited financial resources available to attain these goals within the traditional walls of college campuses. The remarkable changes in instructional technology already evidenced in business, industry, and many educational institutions, together with the political sensitivity to massive and expensive expansion of higher education as it is currently operating, strongly suggest the creation of new ways of expanding higher education opportunities. The Regents External Degree Program, by contributing to an educated citizenry, will also enhance the social and economic development of the State and the Nation and provide social and economic mobility for the individual who is frequently barred from advancement in employment and increased social status just because he doesn't have a degree.

Basically, there are several aspects to establishing, within the New York State Education Department, the capability of developing programs leading to external degrees.

1. Using the skill and experience of the academic community, a procedure must be created to validate the educational accomplishments of independent study and such validation must itself be acceptable to the academic community at large. Building on the credibility already earned, the College Proficiency Examination Program will expand the nature and scope of its operation in support of an external degree.

2. An imaginative and comprehensive program is needed to support greater use of independent study, to marshall non-traditional educational

resources, e.g., short courses in business and industry, community and neighborhood educational programs, union leadership training, TV courses, to support individuals seeking an education that can subsequently be validated and recognized by a college degree. The Home Study Clearinghouse, a unit of the College Proficiency Examination Program, must enlarge its concern for facilitating extramural learning, and thereby supplement the supportive activities proposed by State University, and those which may be planned by City University and the private sector.

3. The concept of an independent study or external degree must gain acceptability in academic circles or else its value will be nil. Part of the effort in awarding external degrees will be directed toward defining what constitutes an undergraduate degree. Qualified scholars representing the Department will be engaged in extensive dialogue with their faculty colleagues on campuses to enlist understanding and to allay fears of shoddiness. In addition, we will need to establish the administrative mechanism including ground rules, safeguards, and review procedures to handle the volume of applicants that can be anticipated. Studies will be conducted to determine the specific needs and interests of individuals who would benefit from an external degree program. Further, there is the need to prepare cost analyses that will enable the independent study program ultimately to be largely self-supporting.

If we merely provide an examination system to validate claims of educational achievement, however worthy the enterprise, we will not be

meeting the needs of many people who are unable to prepare independently for a college degree. These individuals will need guidance in planning their programs of studies, indeed, formal instruction either by correspondence, television or radio, short courses throughout the year -- that is, services provided by existing colleges and universities and other agencies. The Regents hope that their external degree program will stimulate the State University, the City University, and the State's private colleges and universities to use their great resources in expanding their own programs for the extension of educational opportunity. State University, as you know, has announced plans to establish a non-residential college similar to the British Open University. As the largest university system in the world, State University is singularly equipped to instruct students preparing for its own degrees and for Regents External Degrees. By establishing learning centers open to all across the State, they will be able to provide guidance and instruction for those who need it, and thereby serve as a model for other state systems to follow. State University's University of the Air and its Independent Study Program will also provide additional sources for earning credit toward a Regents External Degree through home study.

For students who wish to work entirely by independent study or supplement their formal college work in this manner, in order to earn a Regents External Degree, some assistance will be needed in selecting appropriate materials from the vast educational resources now available. What we call our Home Study Clearinghouse will collect and analyze the various

types of home study materials, and report their suitability and appropriateness to individuals seeking a college degree by means of independent study.

We propose to develop a series of examinations, both oral and written which could be used as part of the program leading to Regents External Degrees. Some of these testing instruments will be used to validate an undergraduate baccalaureate major in a subject field traditionally offered by colleges and universities in New York State. Simultaneously, we will develop testing instruments leading to an associate degree. Existing tests available from the College Entrance Examination Board and our own College Proficiency Exams should facilitate this task significantly. If general education requirements are established for a specific subject these could be met by regular undergraduate study, proficiency exams, or otherwise, as determined by the faculty committees. A candidate who is successful on the comprehensive examination in his field and who meets the general education requirements will be awarded an associate or a bachelor's degree by the Regents of the University of the State of New York.

We will also investigate ways of granting degrees to individuals who have accumulated large amounts of credit without a specific major sequence of course work. In this instance, the Department would act as a "credit bank" keeping track of credits amassed by candidates through college transcripts or proficiency examinations.

In the development of comprehensive exams for the major field of study on the baccalaureate level, we expect to follow the basic procedures which

have proved to be successful in the preparation of College Proficiency Examinations in single subjects. Faculty members representing a considerable number of New York State higher institutions will be asked to design an acceptable collegiate curriculum in business administration, for example. The committee will devote its attention to developing testing instruments of various types under the guidance of consultants in professional educational testing. Those testing instruments ready by late spring of 1972 will be administered to seniors completing undergraduate programs in business administration. Faculty members involved in the development of the tests will participate in the administration of them and prepare a detailed report on all phases of testing, both oral and written. In addition to the paper-pencil test results, an audio-tape and a video-tape recording will be made of the oral examination. Following this initial "tryout" of various parts of the validating instrument, the summer and fall of 1972 will be used to review and revise the tests. During the winter of 1972-73 we will continue to develop the remaining parts of the battery so that by spring 1973 the entire validating instrument on the baccalaureate level might be ready for use in a second "tryout" situation.

Simultaneously, other faculty members from institutions of higher learning in the State will be using a similar methodology to develop a valid testing instrument for a two-year associate degree, again under the guidance of consultants in professional educational testing. Developing a series of exams leading to an associate degree in specific fields will not necessarily

be less complicated and time-consuming than the development of exams leading to a baccalaureate degree. An associate in arts degree might very well be awarded on the basis of existing proficiency examinations, like the College Board's general and subject tests and the Department's College Proficiency Examinations.

Under this plan, associate degrees might be offered to the public as early as 1972, and a bachelor's of business administration by late 1973. In the meantime prospective candidates will have the opportunity to make appropriate preparation based on the curriculum descriptions provided by the faculty panels.

Business administration was chosen as an illustrative curriculum because our records suggest that there are large numbers of businessmen who may be qualified by their experience and training to benefit immediately from the educational opportunity afforded by this program. It would seem that it is a subject area reasonably well prescribed, which lends itself to a variety of examination techniques, both oral and written. Furthermore, there are extensive programs of formal and informal education in business and industry which constitute in our minds an important but previously untapped educational resource. If successful in traditional academic areas, we will develop comprehensive examinations and new evaluation techniques for non-traditional educational experiences, such as technical, industrial, and military training. We will also explore new curricular areas which may not yet be fully formed on any single college campus.

The examinations now available from the College Proficiency Examination Program and the College Level Examination Program of the College Entrance Examination Board provide an advantageous starting point for the Regents External Degree Program, especially as it pertains to traditional collegiate programs. Many other equally acceptable and useful testing instruments already exist for non-traditional areas of study.

The Department intends to make maximum use of the testing instruments currently available to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and expense, and to accelerate the development of the total program. Such prover examinations will be considered as a means of earning a college-equivalency type degree or certificate. It may very well be that individuals having demonstrated competence through proficiency examinations and college courses could qualify for undergraduate degrees of a general nature, primarily on the basis of total credit accumulated.

As important as an external degree system will be to every citizen in the State, indeed in the country, I would be remiss if I failed to emphasize the greater importance of identifying, then harnessing all of the educational resources within the State into an overall educational system that extends far beyond the formal educational agencies of schools and colleges. It includes television, radio, the church, extension divisions, research laboratories, performing arts centers, proprietary business, trade and technical schools, historical societies, public libraries, museums, correspondence study, VISTA,

the Peace Corps, industrial, commercial, governmental, and military programs -- and much more.

The College Proficiency Examination Program with its Home Study Clearinghouse, will marshall at least some of these resources. Undoubtedly, the external degree will give a meaningful focus to this overall system, especially to educational television and other new technologies as they pertain to the independent learner at the post-secondary level. But while making degrees available to anyone who can qualify, we must continue to strive to make the public aware that a collegiate education is not the only avenue to quality education that is available after high school, that other avenues can lead to financially and intellectually rewarding occupational pursuits.

In their planning for higher education in the seventies the Regents speak of "Education Beyond High School." Since I view education as a continuous process in a day when lifelong learning is essential, I will continue to work for equal access to post-secondary education, including all kinds of trade, technical and semi-professional institutions, non-profit or proprietary, as well as formal collegiate programs. I stress equal access to post-secondary opportunities and not universal higher education attendance. In short, I look for a more flexible and open system of education with increased opportunity for students to participate in any program at any level at which they are capable of performing, for each student to proceed at his own pace. We need, too, more honorable forms of educational entry, exit, and re-entry, to create

more socially approved channels for interrupting and resuming education, that will permit people, young and old, to work in and out of an educational setting as their interests and circumstances dictate. Necessary also, are increased emphasis on independent study, more accommodating transfer policies between differing types of educational agencies, less indulgence in the narcissism of small differences and less academic snobbishness about acceptance of credit for knowledge unconventionally acquired.

We shall see, increasingly, four marked changes in post-secondary education: first, compensatory education, meaning extra counseling, tutoring, and remedial instruction, in our colleges and universities for those who seek a formal college education, but who have deficiencies in their pre-college education; secondly, a loosening-up of the requirements that a student must finish his formal education in a lockstep prescribed calendar of two or four years; thirdly, growing recognition that there are other post-secondary roads to success and self-fulfillment besides our formal collegiate institutions, and fourthly, that you don't have to go to college at all in order to secure the credentials for upward mobility in a highly credentialed society characterized by degree-fixation. The costs of traditionalism are too high.

Your help is required to assure that the need and right of all our citizens to realize their potential through education beyond high school is accepted as vital to the public interest.

In closing, I am reminded of the chairman of a college board of trustees who was once asked what had become of his last president: "He left

us as he came," replied, "fired with enthusiasm." I hope you will leave this meeting fired with enthusiasm to support the Department and the State University in these ventures and in introducing greater flexibility into higher education and our credential-conscious society.

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